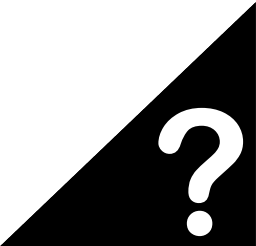



## How good are you at the moment?

**Are you sure what the purpose of a report is and what you are being asked to write about?**  
**Yes:** You have a good idea of why you are being asked to write a report (and not, for instance, an essay), what you are expected to write about in your report and how you should structure it.  
☐ **No:** You are not very sure about the reasons for writing a report, what you should be writing about or how you should structure your report.

**Are you confident you know how to structure a report in a way that will answer the task you were asked to do?**  
**Yes:** You know the conventions in your subject area for what sections your report needs to include and what information each section should include.  
**No:** You are unclear to what goes where in a written report and you are not confident that you can structure a report in the way that is conventional.

**Do you know what the format of a report and what all the sections are called and what purpose they each serve?**  
**Yes:** You know all headings of the sections that go to make up a report and you know what type of information goes into each section of the report.  
**No:** You are not entirely sure what headings you would put before the sections of a report and not sure what these headings represent and the type of information that should be in the different sections.






### The main points

The report is an assessed coursework common to many courses and disciplines

The report differs from the essay in the sense that the essay is developing an argument and the report is a formal write up of an experiment, evaluation, piece of research or investigation.

The report is structured with headings and sections that include specific information to help the reader to scan the report to find a particular piece of information.

The style and format is not uniform across all courses and disciplines but it varies greatly. The format will also depend on the purpose and audience of the report.



### Student Academic Support

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Appointments available or drop by for quick questions Mondays to Fridays, 10am to 4pm.

Find us on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Blackboard.

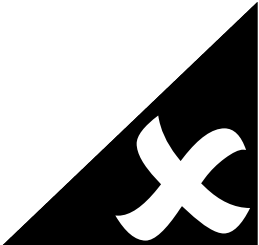
<http://www.abertay.ac.uk/studying/support/academic>


## How did you do?

A large white checkmark is positioned in the bottom right corner of a black triangular area.

If you answered mainly ‘**yes**’ then you should be able to write a structured report that satisfies the criteria set out by the assessment, however this handout may give you further information about the report writing style, different types of reports or what markers look for.

If you answered mainly ‘**no**’ then this report will be invaluable as a starting point with basic information about structure and what the report is for and what roles each section plays.






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### Writing reports.

The report is an assessed coursework common to many courses and disciplines

The report differs from the essay in the sense that the essay is developing an argument and the report is a formal write up of an experiment, evaluation, piece of research or investigation.

The report is structured with headings and sections that include specific information to help the reader to scan the report to find a particular piece of information.

The style and format is not uniform across all courses and disciplines but it varies greatly. The format will also depend on the purpose and audience of the report.

**Want more?**

Other guides available on Blackboard from Student Academic Support that you might find useful:

- Starting coursework
- Writing essays.
- Effective research.
- Referencing and avoiding plagiarism.

**Online:**

- LearnHigher** is a great starting point, full of excellent resources to develop all aspects of your approach to learning - including printable timetables, coursework planners, and more.
- University of Canberra:** a generic guide to the structure and purpose of a report.
- <http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/writing/reports>
- Writing Centre:** More detail about the possible sections in a lab report and what goes in them.
- <http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/labs.html>
- Surrey University:** Good overview of the reasons for report writing.
- <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/Skills/pack/report.html>

**At Abertay:**

Visit Student Services on level 2 of the library, including:

- English as a foreign language:**
- Amanda Shaw - [a.shaw@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:a.shaw@abertay.ac.uk).
- Advice for disabled students:**
- Claire Allan - [c.allan@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:c.allan@abertay.ac.uk).

The main sections of a report.

What follows is list of the more common sections that constitute a report and roughly the type of information that will typically go in each section. The information that goes in each section might vary slightly for different disciplines and if you are unsure ask a tutor for more guidelines on the format required. With some assessments, your tutor might accept or encourage you to create your own headings and sections.

- **Title:**  
The title provides a brief guide to the reader what the report is about. Aim for no more than 15 words in length.
- **Abstract:**  
The abstract is like mini report: it summarises the whole report in one concise paragraph of about 100-200 words. The abstract informs the reader what was carried out and what results of this investigation were. As the abstract summarises the whole report, not just the research or experiment you undertook, you cannot write the abstract until after you have completed the writing the rest of the report.
- **Introduction:**  
The job of the abstract is to summarise the whole report; the introduction on the other hand outlines the purpose of the report and explains to the reader what the experiment or research is about. Usually, the introduction states the problem to be solved or the research or task to be performed and explains its purpose and significance. It also provides whatever background theory, previous research or studies the research is based on.
- **Methods and materials (or equipment):**  
This section provides details on how the research was carried out and may consist of a list of materials or equipment and possibly a precise account of how the research or experiment was carried out in the correct order without missing out any important details.
- **Results:**  
In this section you report the results of your investigation or experiment. Results can be presented as figures or perhaps visually in tables or graphs, all graphs and figures should be clearly labelled.
- **Discussion:**  
In this section, you must briefly describe again in your own words your results or research findings and, at greater length, interpret them with regards to what was expected. You are also expected to relate findings back to previous studies, and to mention problems or elements of the research that did not work out. This is a crucial part of the report since it is here that you show your understanding of what you have done and its context in the broader subject area, give your interpretation of the results and show that you understand the significant of the experiment and the results.
- **Conclusion:**  
The conclusion may be similar to the discussion above or it may come after the discussion and simply sum up the main points in a short paragraph. In some report styles the results, discussion, and conclusion sections can be combined in various ways. Some report guidelines will ask for a recommendation section at the end of the report where you sum up by stating the best way forward or action.
- **References:**  
Most reports require references at the end. Use the correct referencing style for the particular discipline you are working in. Always consult your tutor or a style manual about referencing formats.
- **Appendices:**  
Appendices usually contain raw data, calculations, graphs, and other quantitative materials that were part of the experiment, but were too big to include in the main body of the report or the inclusion of this material was not appropriate. Remember you must refer to each appendix at the appropriate point (or points) in your report, for example, ‘A Likert scale questionnaire was used (see appendix 1)’.

What are the differences between an essay and a report?

The Format of a Report	The Format of an Essay
Presents information and findings from task	Presents an argument to answer a question.
Is meant to be scanned quickly by the reader to pick out particular information.	Is meant to be read carefully
Uses headings and sub-headings and is structured into sections.	It is not conventional to have headings.
May not need references and bibliography/ reference list	Always needs references and bibliography/ reference list
For some subject areas uses short, concise paragraphs and bullet-points where applicable.	Links ideas into cohesive paragraphs, rather than breaking them down into a list of dot-points
Uses graphics wherever possible (tables, graphs, illustrations) especially when describing results of research.	Rarely uses graphics, pictures or graphs
For some disciplines may require an abstract (sometimes called an executive summary)	Does not usually have an abstract.
May conclude with recommendations and/or appendices	Does not normally have recommendations or appendices

Are there similarities between an essay and a report?

- Both essays and reports need:
- A format style.
  - Careful proof-reading and neat presentation
  - A structure with an introduction, body and conclusion
  - Critical or analytical thinking

